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ABSTRACT

This publication is part of the study materials for the distance education course, Language and Literacies: Contexts and Challenges in the Workplace, in the Open Campus Program at Deakin University. The document traces the historical development of Australia's Workplace Basic Education Project (WBEP) model for taking literacy provision into the workplace, examines selected integral aspects of the model, and considers selected issues in developing and delivering workplace literacy programs. The introduction provides an overview of key moments in the WBEP's development since its establishment in 1984. Among the topics discussed in the five sections are the following: origins of the WBEP (developments in the adult literacy field, the political and industrial context, and other programs); challenges encountered during development of the WBEP (advisory committees, field work, identification of target audiences, and project goals); the WBEP delivery model (needs surveys; the planning group; program evaluation; and provision related issues such as voluntary participation, open access, confidentiality, negotiated work time, and assessment and formal testing); curriculum (curriculum development, a writing class in action, and literacy in the workplace); and taking stock (participation rates among women; reading, writing, and mathematics in workplace training; the growth of training expertise; and program strengths). Appended is an excerpt from "Principles of Workplace Basic Education." Contains a 25-item reference list and a 20-item bibliography. (MN)

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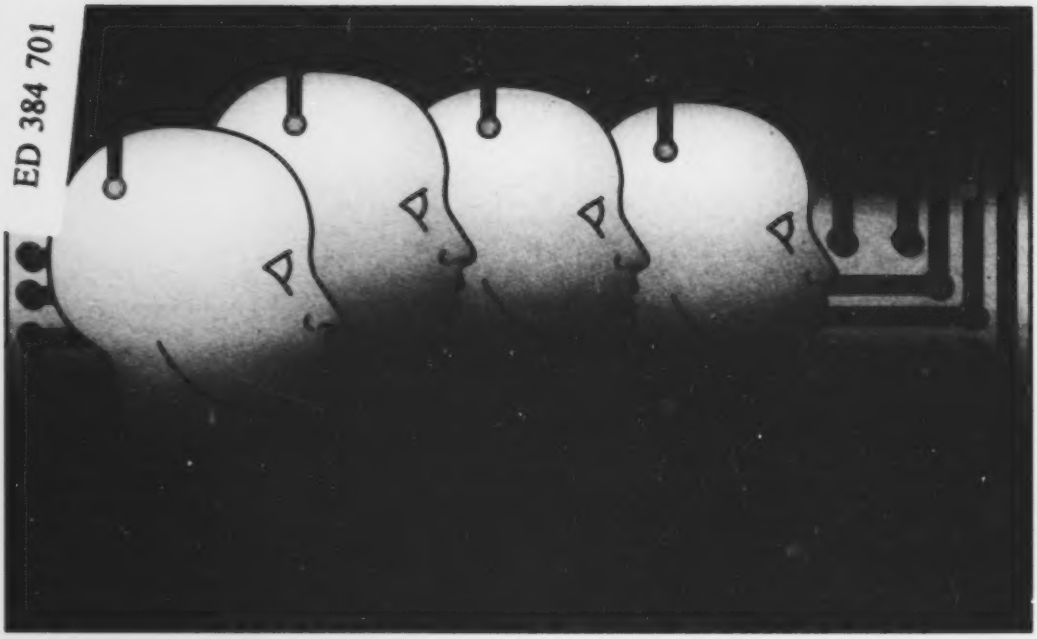

LITERACY AT WORK: THE WORKPLACE BASIC EDUCATION PROJECT MODEL OF DELIVERY

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EAE646 LANGUAGE AND LITERACIES: CONTEXTS AND CHALLENGES IN THE WORKPLACE

LITERACY AT WORK: THE WORKPLACE BASIC EDUCATION PROJECT MODEL OF DELIVERY

JUDE NEWCOMBE

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

This book has been produced as part of the study materials for EAE646 *Language and Literacies: Contexts and Challenges in the Workplace*, which is one of the units offered by the Faculty of Education in Deakin University's Open Campus Program. It has been prepared for the unit team, whose members are:

Mike Brown
Sally Leavold
Doris Tate
Steve Wright

The study materials include:
*Literacies and the Workplace: A Collection of Original Essays**
Literacies in the Workplace: A Reader
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SERIES INTRODUCTION

The nature and purpose of education in the workplace has been the subject of much debate in Australia in recent years. While the vagaries of local and international competition have led many firms to reconsider the role of their workforce and the training requirements this entails, governments have been equally keen to adapt existing education systems to the perceived needs of industry. Leading union bodies have been distinguished in this debate by their pro-active role, outlining the path by which a reconstructed industrial climate can win the nation a new place in the world economy.

The study materials of which this volume is a part explore the approaches to learning currently modelled within industry. In the process the question inevitably arises as to whether existing orientations and practices are in the best interests of the various stakeholders in the workplace.

The arguments developed in these volumes address themselves to a range of contemporary issues in industrial education. To date, prevailing approaches have rested upon narrow, instrumentalist notions of learning; in their different ways, the writers have set out to challenge this orthodoxy. In doing so, they highlight the silences—on questions of gender, class or ethnicity—that underpin the behaviourist outlook still dominant in the world of training.

In preparing these study materials, the course team has sought to address issues that are of fundamental concern to those involved in the complex and demanding field of workplace learning. It is hoped that, in its own modest way, the pedagogy we have developed can serve to exemplify a different notion of what industrial education might become.

PREFACE

I wish to thank Nina Earl for her enthusiasm and patience in working on this document. For encouragement, support and criticism, I am indebted to members of my reference group, Rex Ennis and Jill Hocking, and to members of the reading group, Delia Bradshaw, Deb Davison, Mary Draper and Helen Gribble. I also wish to thank all other members of the Workplace Basic Education Project at the Council of Adult Education.

J.N.
August 1992

ABBREVIATIONS

ACAL	Australian Council for Adult Literacy
ALAN	Adult Literacy and Numeracy
AMES	Adult Migrant Education Service
AMWU	Amalgamated Metal Workers Union
ASE	Australian Society of Engineers
ASLPR	Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings
CAE	Council of Adult Education
EFT	effective full-time
EIWP	English in the Workplace
EOJ	English on the Job
ESB	English-speaking Background
MTIA	Metal Trades Industry Association
NBEET	National Board of Employment, Education and Training
NESB	Non-English-speaking Background
NTB	National Training Board
QWL	Quality of Working Life
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VBU	Vehicle Builders Union
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VEETAC	Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee
VIC	Vehicle Industry Certificate
WBEP	Workplace Basic Education Project
WELL	Workplace Language and Literacy Program

INTRODUCTION

The Workplace Basic Education Project (WBEP) was established in 1984. It owed its existence and initial educational framework to the adult literacy movement, as it was then in Victoria, and in particular to the literacy program in the Council of Adult Education's (CAE) Access Department. During the early 1980s, adult literacy provision was beginning a phase of expansion. The project was established during this phase, well before workplace reform, award restructuring, and national training initiatives thrust workplace language and literacy provision into the spotlight.

For nearly fifty years, research has indicated that adult literacy is an issue in Australia. The Duncan Report on Adult Education revealed that 4% of the 1943 Australian army intake was functionally illiterate and that up to 20% had severe difficulty with reading and writing tasks. This information was ignored by the Australian Government in 1964 when it provided information to UNESCO indicating that Australia had a 100% literacy rate. This was based on the misconception that universal compulsory school provision resulted in reading, writing and maths skills adequate for life in Australian society. The Goyen Report (Goyen 1979) stated that 3.7% of people from English-speaking backgrounds and 43.4% of people from non-English-speaking countries were functionally illiterate (Gribble 1991, p.1). Research by Rosie Wickert examined adult performance in different kinds of literacy and in different contexts. For example, 16% of those surveyed were unable to match 'gross pay' and 'year to date' on a pay slip, and only 54% were able to read a label to determine the correct medicine dosage for a child (Wickert 1989, p.13). In her conclusion, Wickert states:

> One of the most disturbing results of this survey was that it revealed that approximately 70 per cent of the sample were unable to get at the ideas behind what they were reading (p. 49)

It was not until the 1970s that adult literacy provision began to be established. Before 1973 only two adult literacy programs existed in Australia. In 1973 five new programs were established across Australia. One of these was in the CAE Access Department (Gribble 1991, p.2).

In the Access program a significant number of literacy students attended evening classes after completing a day's work and a small number of others attended daytime classes with the support of their employers. Research conducted into case histories of adult literacy students contributed directly to the thinking at CAE about the need to develop workplace provision.

In 1983, CAE conducted field research into the feasibility of providing basic education in the workplace. A basic writing class at Williamstown Naval Dockyards was part of that study. Six workers met for one and a half hours on Tuesday mornings. They were beginners at reading and writing and their first language was English. The class was one of the first of its kind. It marked the beginning of workplace basic education.

In 1984, the WBEP was established by a seeding grant from the State Ministry of Employment and Training. However, securing ongoing funding was a major hurdle. WBEP remained on short-term funding from the Department of Labour for the next three years. After many submissions, reports and with much lobbying, the project was transferred to TAFE recurrent funding in 1987. With the creation of the Division of Further Education, funding for the project was included in the base funding allocation to CAE. WBEP became the core of the Workplace Basic Education Department of CAE. By 1991, the majority of classes conducted by WBEP were at least partially paid for by employers.

Establishing classes in industry in the early 1980s was difficult. WBEP staff had to convince employers of the need for literacy provision and of the importance to industry of a literate and skilled workforce. Filing cabinets bulging with outgoing correspondence attested to how many approaches fell on deaf ears.

Since then, much has changed. WBEP is now approached by more employers than it has resources to deal with. Industry is now much more responsive to the need for basic education. The publicity generated during the International Year of Literacy did much to increase awareness of the nature and extent of illiteracy. In addition, the Federal Government regularly highlighted the need for a better educated population, 'the clever country', and the relationship between a highly skilled workforce and more competitive industry. The Training Guarantee Legislation, the establishment of National and State Training Boards, and the inclusion of training provision in industrial awards, have led to a strong demand for basic education classes and wider acceptance of paid time-release for employees.

Many education providers, TAFE colleges, community-based providers of further education and private companies, as well as WBEP and the Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) now conduct language and

literacy classes in industry. New projects in the last few years have led to a variety of approaches and models of delivery.

This case study charts WBEP's experience of taking literacy provision into the workplace. By examining the underlying principles and historical influences which shaped WBEP's practice, I hope to clarify the nature of that experience. This document looks at the historical development of the WBEP model, examines aspects which are integral to the model, and considers issues which are frequently asked about workplace basic education.

Finally, the danger in documenting any model is that only surface characteristics are replicated elsewhere; as if cast in stone, the model becomes rigid. Democratic principles, an understanding of adult literacy and the nature of adult learning informed the development of the model. It is, and should remain, a flexible, adaptable and evolving model.

ORIGINS

It was an environment of educational, political and industrial change which provided the context for the development of WBEP. Labor governments at state and federal level encouraged workers' participation in decision-making and in training. A climate of innovations existed in the adult literacy field. The adult literacy movement was looking for ways of extending the delivery of education and improving the methods used in adult basic education.

In this section, aspects of the period in which WBEP became established are considered under the following headings:

- Developments in the adult literacy field
- The political and industrial context
- Other programs

Each of these played a part in shaping the Workplace Basic Education Project.

Developments in the adult literacy field

During the 1970s, research backed up the experience of tutors and teachers and showed that there were multiple causes for adult illiteracy (Dymock 1982, p. 21).

Reasons included disrupted or inadequate schooling, social and emotional difficulties in childhood, physical problems, negative school experiences, and specific learning difficulties (Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council Inc. 1987, p. 1). In Victoria, paid adult literacy workers, volunteers and students formed a grassroots network with a strong sense of commitment to improving the quality and extent of adult literacy provision. Paolo Freire's works were influential, although there was little rigorous examination of what application Freire's work with the poor peasantry in Latin America had on adult literacy teaching in relatively

affluent, industrialised Australia. However, Freire inspired many by placing literacy and illiteracy in a social, political and historical context. Like educators and learners elsewhere, adult literacy workers looked to historical and social factors, as well as educational and personal factors, to explain why so many adults were unable to read and write. Many adult literacy workers talked about 'empowering' students. However, there was an ongoing debate whether 'empowering' was to do with assertiveness and personal development or with political process.

Nonetheless, in adult literacy the roles of teacher–student–learner challenged traditional hierarchies. Attitudes had shifted (Grant 1987, p. 16). People who could not read or write were no longer labelled 'illiterates', nor were they considered stupid, lazy or irresponsible because they had failed to learn at school. Literacy workers recognised the courage it took for many adults to become students in an adult literacy program.

Many adults were often ashamed and guilty about their reading and writing difficulties and blamed themselves (Dymock 1982, p. 11). This concept of themselves as failures and negative memories of teaching at school formed further barriers to learning (Grant 1987, p. 12). It also had major implications for approaches to teaching and settings for delivery.

The shift in attitude and some of its implications were expressed by Pablo Foster in his address at the 1983 Australian Council for Adult Literacy (ACAL) conference, where he addressed literacy workers as:

> ... pioneers because you've achieved a major shift in education from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning ... And what don't you do ... if you can help it? You don't put people off by being formal or using academic language or by testing and grading them all the time. You don't make people feel failures or feel that the course or the exam or qualification is more important than them. You put people first. (quoted in Grant 1987, pp. 16–17)

During 1983 and 1984, the literacy program in the CAE Access Department underwent a period of transition. Tutors (the term traditionally used to refer to trained and qualified teachers in adult literacy and basic education) reconsidered how and what they were teaching and asked themselves, 'Where and how does this student best begin learning?' Ready-made spelling lists, reliance on phonics and red biros for marking were tossed aside. Team-teaching between experienced tutors and participatory research strengthened the debate. Literacy work was influenced by the following concepts and methodological developments:

- literacy defined to encompass not only functional skills of reading and writing but also the relationship between literacy and the student's world;

- the whole language approach integrating reading, writing, speaking and listening with thinking and reflecting;
- psycholinguistic insights into language and literacy learning; and
- the 'process' approach to teaching and learning writing.

The political and industrial context

The pilot study and the seeding grant for WBEP were funded during the early years of the State Labor Government. In the early 1980s, this government encouraged new projects which directed resources to working people and the modernisation of industry.

At the level of Federal Government, Prime Minister Hawke extolled consensus politics and consensus decision-making. One aspect of Federal industrial relations policy thus promoted the trialling of industrial democracy which gave unions access to information in industry and involved them in decisions about workplace change.

When WBEP conducted its first classes at Williamstown Naval Dockyards, industrial democracy was a key aspect of the Ministry of Defence plans for modernisation. Modes of production, equipment and organisational structures were outdated. Many workers had a sense of urgency about retraining. Computerisation, high-tech machinery and streamlined work processes were necessary and workers were aware that their training was inadequate. The Amalgamated Metal Workers' Union (AMWU) and some other unions were actively involved in industrial democracy initiatives and in education programs. Other unions were cautious and unconvinced that industrial democracy and education programs were heading in the right direction. Nonetheless, unions and management supported paid time-release for basic education.

The Dockyards were unique. In most workplaces there was no tradition of broad education programs which were accessible to all. In-house training in larger companies was sometimes quite extensive. However, the participation rate of unskilled and semi-skilled workers was low, particularly compared with the involvement of more senior employees in training and development programs undertaken in paid worktime. This was in contrast to paid educational leave arrangements in some European countries, like Italy and Sweden, and the amount of expenditure spent on training employees in countries like Japan and Germany.

In the early 1980s, in Australia, the role of unions in education and training was not established. Many people in industry and education

doubted (and, in some cases, refused to accept) that unions had any valuable contribution to make to the development of good quality, relevant education and training.

On the other hand, some companies were developing models of management which entailed developing structures for employee participation—Quality Circles, Total Quality Control, Quality of Working Life. The form and direction of these developments varied greatly; some employee participation arrangements were entwined harmoniously with union structures but others seemed to be hostile to union involvement.

Other programs

The shape of WBEP was influenced by other programs working in industry at that time. The most influential were the Adult Migrant Education Industrial Program (now known as English in the Workplace—EIWP), English on the Job (EOJ) and Workbase (UK).

The Adult Migrant Education Service (AMES) conducted English language classes for non-English-speaking background (NESB) workers. Classes were usually held twice a week for two hours a session. All classes were held in worktime, and wherever possible in the morning. Negotiations for time-release and the way classes would be conducted were undertaken by the officer responsible for fieldwork in AMES. Although WBEP classes are often held only once a week, the pattern of time-release and fieldwork are reflected in WBEP practice.

The EOJ Project, set up in the State Transport Authority in 1984, developed a model of workplace language provision which built on the experience of AMES. Its management committee members were tripartite (management, unions, and education providers). Tripartite shopfloor committees were later established. The curriculum was not restricted to workplace material and included the language needed at home and in the community as well as work-related material. WBEP closely paralleled EOJ in using tripartite structures and broad-based curriculum.

In the United Kingdom, the Workbase Unit conducted literacy and basic education classes in paid worktime. Workbase involved local union representatives, supervisors and students in planning, organising and evaluating courses. Its documentation showed carefully considered processes for the conduct of needs analysis surveys. WBEP's needs survey process and the role it gives to the planning group owe much to the Workbase model.

Summary

In this section, the context in which the Workplace Basic Education Project was initially set up has been sketched. The literacy workers who began working for the project were enthusiastic about emerging good adult literacy practice. Industrial democracy and attitudes to employee involvement in decision-making helped to shape the processes WBEP developed. WBEP also drew on other models of delivery of workplace language and literacy provision.

CHALLENGES IN A NEW CONTEXT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK-PLACE BASIC EDUCATION PROJECT

This section outlines key aspects of the historical development of WBEP. It is a history which reflects the changing times and economic concerns in Victoria, and which reveals the challenges for adult literacy practitioners in this context. It includes the role of the advisory committee, fieldwork and the constraints on establishing programs in the workplace in worktime, issues related to the target group and the development and refining of goals.

In establishing the project, challenges existed on many levels. Coordinators faced the task of convincing employers and funding bodies that literacy provision in the workplace was viable. The 'workplace'—both individual workplaces and industry generally—was a new environment for many literacy workers. Tutors had to begin working in a context extremely sensitive to economic imperatives, industrial relations and changes in government policy. They were accountable in a different way. The pedagogy of literacy needed to be developed in response to the workplace context and its pressures, but in such a way that what had been learnt in good adult literacy practice was not denied and forgotten. The definition of WBEP goals recognises the need to address these issues.

Advisory committee

From the outset, WBEP worked with an overall steering committee made up of representatives from CAE, the Ministry of Employment and Training (later Department of Labour), AMES, the Metal Trades Industry Association (MTIA), the AMWU, the Office of the TAFE Board and the Ethnic Affairs Commission. The initial brief of the steering committee was to ensure the project was 'integrated with other associated activities' (Submission to the

Ministry of Employment and Training, 1984). The committee met quarterly, heard reports and gave assistance and advice.

A number of contentious issues arose during the steering committee meetings. These included the issue of time-release and whether WBEP publicity could state that a class would be held in 'worktime'. The project settled on the formulation 'in negotiated worktime' in its publicity . The other major issue was the extent to which the project should deal exclusively with 'native' English speakers so that all students of non-English-speaking background would be referred to AMES courses. Both these issues are discussed later.

The development of WBEP was greatly assisted by steering committee members. The MTIA publicised the project through its own networks and arranged introductions to employers and Chambers of Manufacturers in country regions. The AMWU allocated time slots in union training courses for project staff to talk to union members about basic education provision. Literacy and English language provision was included in AMWU negotiations for industrial democracy and retraining provisions in a number of workplaces.

In 1986, the steering committee was strengthened by the fact that the Victorian Trades Hall Council took up a seat on the steering committee. The steering committee played an important role in securing ongoing funding for WBEP and its transfer to TAFE recurrent funding.

Fieldwork

The original submission to the Ministry of Employment and Training envisaged that, after four months, the project would have thirty classes in workplaces and that in 1985 this would increase to forty-five. In retrospect this vision was unrealistic, although it did serve to galvanise the WBEP team into concerted fieldwork endeavours. It would have been impossible to predict the impact of external constraints and timelines over which the project had no control:

- WBEP coordinators were negotiating for time-release for broad-based education classes. It was not possible to assert honestly that a direct short-term improvement in productivity would result. Some companies, particularly companies with Northern-European/USA/Japanese parent companies, were more willing to accept outcomes which did not have a direct impact on productivity, such as increased employee involvement and creative thinking.

Some public sector personnel managers were amenable to social justice and equal opportunity arguments but it was also in the public sector that the demand for immediate cost benefits was most sharply posed.

- The lack of tradition in providing basic education meant many employers were wary. Someone else had to do it first. Personalities made a difference and the 'x' factor sometimes melted resistance: in one workplace a committed union representative, himself a literacy student, talked, convinced and encouraged the workplace training department; in another company a personnel officer, whose wife was a literacy tutor, reassured other company personnel and actively supported workplace literacy classes.
- It often took years for initial fieldwork visits to bear fruit. A number of workplaces eventually scheduled WBEP programs three or four years after the initial approach.
- Once agreement on time-release for classes was reached, the timelines were quite long. This often reflected workplace priorities. In addition, workplace communication systems are often complex and take longer than might be expected.
- WBEP needed to devise new processes to conduct classes effectively in a workplace. Recruitment and selection of students, in any workplace, involves liaising with workplace personnel and using appropriate processes.

Nonetheless, the growth of the project was steady. In the first eighteen months the majority of classes were held in Williamstown Naval Dockyards. Between 1985 and 1989, 147 classes were conducted in the public and private sectors.

Which workers?

Classes were to be provided for 'workers whose future stable employment may be at risk because of their level of education' (Submission to the Ministry of Employment and Training, 1984).

WBEP aimed to have at least 50% women employees participating in classes. Project staff set this goal recognising that it was more difficult to secure classes in industries where women predominated. One early feature of the project was its development of curriculum materials appropriate for women's maths classes. However, no womens' maths classes were successfully established.

Whether non-English-speaking background (NESB) workers could be included was primarily a question of interface between AMES, English on the Job and the WBEP. Early submissions stated that the project was to *complement* AMES provision. To prevent WBEP encroaching on potential AMES target groups, it was suggested that the project confine itself to 'native English speakers'. Project staff developed an educational criteria which sought to reassure other providers while simultaneously promoting multiculturalism:

> ... classes are open to all those who speak fluent everyday English regardless of cultural background, although 'the primary focus' was 'workers whose first language is English'. (CAE 1986)

By 1988, the 'primary focus' concept had disappeared from the project's publicity. In recent years, the proportion of bilingual students in WBEP classes has continued to increase. This has been partly a result of a greatly increased demand for workplace literacy and language, and partly in response to Federal Government constraints imposed on AMES target groups. On the ground, tutors from AMES and WBEP worked together harmoniously and referred students to each other.

Workplace Basic Education Project goals

Defining goals in the early years

In the original submission the aim of providing classes in the workplace was to make literacy and basic education classes more accessible to working people:

> By the nature of many jobs and pressures on adult lives, especially through family commitments, people are often distanced from the prospect of further education or retraining in their leisure time. (Submission to the Ministry of Employment and Training, 1984)

By taking classes to the workplace, CAE's Access Department hoped to reach people who might otherwise be reluctant or unable to attend an educational institution. The provision of literacy in the workplace was seen as a way of encouraging workers on to further education and training and fulfilling:

> ... an active governmental role in preparing workers for further changes and in adding to skills available in industry. (Submission to Ministry of Employment and Training, 1984)

The Minister of Employment and Training at the time, Mr J. Simmonds MHR, outlined a range of expected outcomes:

> ... obvious benefits from this initiative include access to further training and education, ability to cope with changes in the workplace environment and increased personal confidence and workplace safety. (Ministry of Employment and Training, Media Release, February 1985)

After eighteen months working in the field, the project stated its goals in the following manner:

> The principal aim is to deliver Basic Education to workers whose future stable employment may be at risk because of their levels of education, at the workplace in worktime.
>
> The objectives are:
>
> - the development of a Workplace Basic Education philosophy and practice which is responsive to varying and changing needs of industry and society
> - the development of appropriate workplace curriculum and methodology
> - encouragement of industry to assume responsibility for an education and training role to meet the needs of all workers
>
> (CAE 1986, p. 2)

The project's aims and objectives contributed to the enactment of two key policies of the Victorian Labor Government: the economic strategy and the social justice strategy.

Economic and industrial concerns included: the need to increase efficiency and competitiveness, to introduce technological change, to maintain jobs and generate new areas of employment. Sound basic education laid the foundation for effective broad-based training and contributed to the formation of a broadly skilled and adaptable workforce.

Participation in basic education programs also enabled workers to become more involved in decision-making about changing work processes:

> The most effective use of new technologies calls for a creativity and adaptability involving people at all levels in decision-making about work processes. Such demand on workers requires sound education skills. (CAE 1986, p. 1)

The project addressed the government's social justice policy by redressing educational disadvantage:

> Lack of basic education skills means that many workers are unable to take up training and retraining opportunities; those workers who are educationally disadvantaged are often unable to fully participate in democratic processes.

In a period of high unemployment the vulnerability of these workers is compounded. (CAE 1986, p.1)

Impact of recent policy changes

Since 1988, a number of legislative provisions, ministerial statements and Industrial Relations Commission decisions have changed the context in which workplace language and literacy provision operates. These include:

- The Structural Efficiency Principle which was first established by federal and state Industrial Relations Commissions as part of the centralised wage-fixing process. Awards had to be restructured, updated and modernised. Classification structures were to reflect the skills needed to perform the job. Skills acquisition (and use) became linked to pay rates.

  Clauses providing for skills training in paid worktime have been included in many awards. No federal award, to date, has incorporated language and literacy education as an industrial right, although negotiations continue in some areas.

- The Training Guarantee Fund legislation (federal) which aims to ensure that enterprises allocate at least 1% of their salary budget to training. Basic education programs such as those conducted by WBEP now qualify as 'eligible training programs'.

- The Vocational Education and Training Act (Victoria), which established the State Training Board, a tripartite body which was seen as a key link between industry and the training system. A streamlined system of industry training boards was set in place to advise government of training and vocational education needs and to develop training plans for each industry.

- The establishment of the National Training Board (NTB); the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET); and the Vocational Education, Employment and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC). These bodies promote and coordinate national training and vocational education. A nationally consistent framework for the recognition of training is being implemented, based on the competencies considered necessary for each area of skill. The competency-based approach has been extended in the

Finn Report (1991) and by the work of the Mayer Committee. Areas of employment-related competence are being defined and statements developed for each for inclusion into all post-compulsory education and training programs.

- The release in 1991 of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy. One major initiative of the policy was the establishment of the Workplace Language and Literacy (WELL) Program.

The increase in the initiatives to improve and extend vocational education and training nationally is one response to the need to make Australian industry more efficient and productive and better able to compete in the international marketplace. The downturn in trade in the 1980s and the balance of trade and current account deficits have given rise to a deep-seated anxiety about the future of the economy. This is mirrored in widespread concern about job security among workers. Workplace reform and the increased access to training and vocational education for workers exist alongside redundancy notices for others. Many face the grim prospect of no work in a period of high unemployment.

In response to the changing social, economic and educational climate, in early 1992 WBEP restated its principal aim and its key objectives:

> The principal aim is to deliver workplace basic education in negotiated worktime, to workers whose effective participation in training may be restricted or whose future stable employment may be at risk because they lack a usable secondary education.
>
> The objectives are:
>
> - the continued development and advocacy of a Workplace Basic Education philosophy and practice which is responsive to the varying and changing needs of industry and society
> - the development of appropriate workplace curriculum and methodology
> - to encourage industry to assume responsibility for an education and training role to meet the needs of all workers
>
> (Workplace Basic Education Department Minutes, April 1992)

Summary

Key features in its historical development shaped WBEP's principles and practice. In the formative years, the steering committee had a say in the policies within which project members worked. The project's brief to complement EIWP restricted the number of bilingual students in WBEP

classes, although NESB students now outnumber those from English-speaking backgrounds (ESB). During the early 1980s, the obstacles to establishing classes made fieldwork arduous. With the increased demand for language and literacy provision, some of these constraints disappeared but others affect the fieldwork of all providers, even today.

Finally, the process of developing WBEP's aims took into account the political, industrial and economic climate and the impact of this climate on students' needs. One of WBEP's central aims has always been to develop appropriate philosophy and practice. In the next section, we look at characteristics of the WBEP model.

A MODEL OF DELIVERY

The Workplace Basic Education Project developed a model of delivering adult basic education in the workplace during its early years of operation. The characteristic processes of the WBEP model were documented in 1988 in the paper *Principles of Workplace Basic Education* (see Appendix).

The 'Principles' document was endorsed by the advisory committee and acts as a guideline for WBEP staff and assists in staff evaluation of their work. Other workplace basic education providers have drawn on the WBEP model in developing their own programs in industry. The model has been widely discussed in the Victorian Industry Basic Education Common Interest Group—a forum where many providers of workplace basic education meet to discuss issues, difficulties and successes. A number of the principles are also advocated in the WELL Program guidelines.

This section outlines that model of delivery and discusses issues which are frequently raised. The section is in a number of parts:

- From first contact to first class: The needs survey
- The planning group
- Evaluation
- Issues

From first contact to first class: The needs survey

In the WBEP model, conducting the needs survey is an educational process. Its main purpose is to establish a basic education program in a workplace. The information gathered includes: the educational needs of employees, and their aspirations and plans for education and training; and general information about the company, identified educational needs and other relevant information.

The process is designed to create widespread interest in basic education, to challenge resistance to basic education and to promote a climate where returning to learning is viewed positively and is widely supported. Steps in

the process aim to ensure that provision is managed fairly, professionally and efficiently, and that it is seen to be managed this way.

The process of the needs survey falls into four phases: the introductory phase, the preparatory phase, the collection and compilation of educational needs and, finally, organisation of classes. Figure 1 shows the steps in the process used by WBEP.

The time taken from the initial contact to the beginning of the first class varies enormously. It is usually a matter of several months, even in those workplaces where commitment is strong and internal communications processes are efficient. One step in the process may take weeks if workplace communications are to be fully utilised. It may need several phone calls over a number of days to organise one meeting.

The rationale for the needs survey

The following are the most frequently asked questions about the WBEP needs survey:

- Are all the phases of the needs survey really necessary?
- Why are meetings held with supervisors and union representatives?
- Why are leaflets and written material used to promote classes if prospective students will probably ignore them?
- Why spend so much time briefing people in small groups?
- Why interview everyone who is interested in a class?

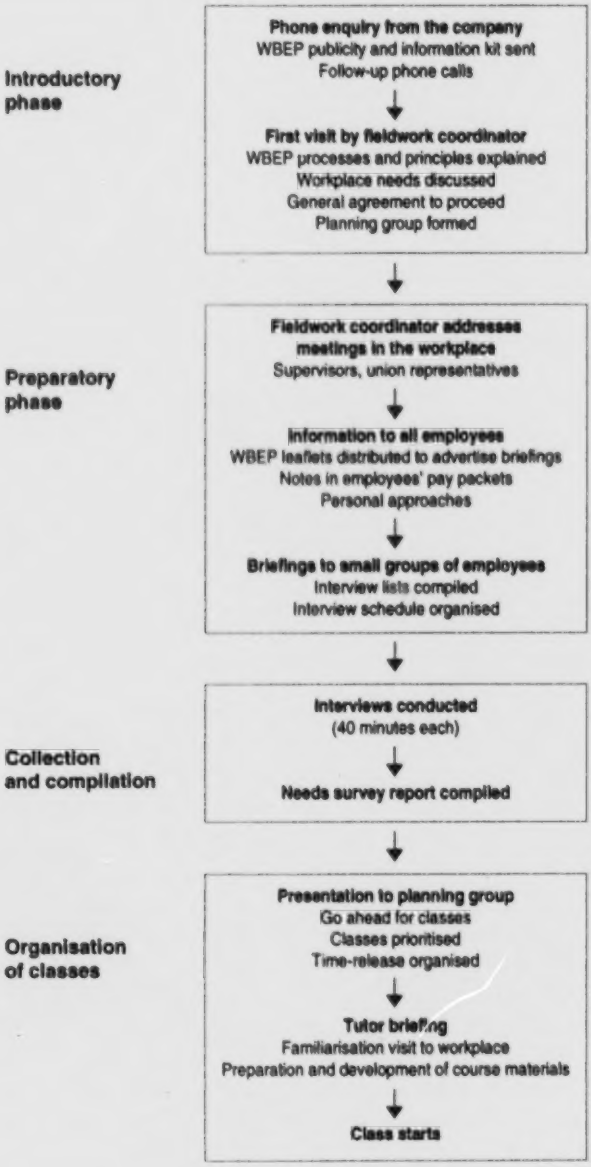
Fieldworkers judge whether all the steps in the needs survey model are necessary in a particular situation. In organisations where extensive training and education has been implemented and where the learning culture is positive, it may make sense to curtail the process.

On the other hand, it is important to the smooth running of the project that as many company personnel as possible understand what is happening and support the role of the 'outside' provider. Furthermore, the way basic education opportunities are explained and the sensitivity with which issues are dealt, may determine the nature and degree of the response from employees.

Meetings are held with supervisors, leading hands and union representatives because they are often aware of who might need to improve language or literacy; they also have valuable knowledge of the workplace itself and its basic education requirements. They are well placed to encourage and support prospective students, as well as being potential students themselves. Because of their leadership role in the workplace, their active

participation does much to counter the stigma that sometimes exists around participation in basic education.

Figure 1 Phases in the needs survey



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Printed flyers, WBEP contributions to company and union notices and training bulletins ensure that line management is kept well informed. They show that the employer and unions are actively and publicly supporting the WBEP program. It is efficient to use well-established communication networks.

Briefing sessions smooth the way for potential students and ensure that everyone gets access to the information. Most people with limited reading skills habitually ignore written notices. Some have perceptions of themselves as non-learners, failures in the education system. In the small group discussions in briefing sessions, these matters can be broached indirectly so that employees may reconsider the relevance of education to them. At the same time, this discussion may challenge those employees who are inclined to mock their peers for 'returning to school'. Attitudes to education and training have shifted in Australia in recent years but there is still some tradition of anti-intellectualism and anti-education.

The preparatory meetings and discussions assist the continued time-release of students and the viability of classes. Classes which are held in worktime affect those who work alongside class participants and their supervisors. While it is preferable that relief is organised when an employee leaves his or her work area to attend classes, this rarely happens. Workmates are often expected to pick up aspects of work not done. Supervisors and leading hands may have to ensure that all the work gets done despite the loss of a worker to a basic education class for two to three hours. These issues need to be aired and ways of solving the problem fully considered, otherwise resentment builds and manifests itself in subtle or overt pressure on students to stay on the job and not attend class.

In the interview, the interviewer assesses the literacy, numeracy and educational needs of the employee. The employee is encouraged to discuss barriers and concerns about returning to study and to consider what goals he or she may have in education and training. The interview is not only essential to appropriate placement in a class; it is also an important step in the employee's preparation for returning to formal learning.

The needs survey provides a valuable opportunity for WBEP to gather information about the company and its employees. The fieldworkers record information about proposed company changes (for example, the introduction of new technology), training plans, work organisation, management initiatives. The workplace history, the industrial climate, the ethnic and gender composition of the workforce, the nature of work processes which may encourage or prevent social interaction—these elements contribute to the workplace culture which provides the context in which classes will operate. Learning needs, educational background and the aspirations of each prospective student are documented. This information, gathered by

the fieldworker, is conveyed to tutors in the initial tutor briefing so that the development of curriculum appropriate to the workplace can begin.

The planning group

The establishment of the planning group is central to the process of organising and conducting classes in each workplace. WBEP planning groups have tripartite representation (employer, union, education provider) and as such they have become a good example in many workplaces of industrial democracy working effectively. As is evident in the example given below, the planning group gathers together the key players and seeks to include the major interest groups. No consideration is given to the balance of numbers. Decisions are rarely made by vote but rather through discussion and consensus.

The role of the planning group is to ensure that courses are relevant to workplace needs and to provide an appropriate forum for discussion and decision-making. The planning group functions as a formal link between the outside provider and the host organisation. Through the discussions and explanations that occur in planning group meetings, an educational perspective is taken into the workplace.

A planning group at work

Planning groups are as different in character as the workplaces in which they exist. At a large manufacturing plant in Melbourne, WBEP began conducting classes in 1986 and it was at this time that the planning group was first established. WBEP continued classes in this plant until the end of 1991.

Members of the planning group were active participants in the discussions and decision-making and many undertook additional work which promoted the ongoing success of the basic education program. At the same time, negotiations were not always easy and discussions and administrative arrangements were often complex because of the size of the company.

Composition

Over the years, the planning group retained a core membership. The company was usually represented by two Quality of Working Life (QWL) facilitators and the training manager, who was also the QWL manager, attended frequently. On occasions, additional management representatives

from different sections of the company joined the planning group. Two shopfloor supervisors came regularly. Representatives from the three major unions, the Vehicle Builder's Union (VBU), AMWU and the Australian Society of Engineers (ASE), were invariably at the meetings. Student representatives came from each course in progress. The meetings were usually chaired by a WBEP coordinator and WBEP tutors reported on their classes. The size of the planning group was larger than usual—sixteen attended the April 1988 meeting and there were usually no less than eight people present. This reflects the size of the company and its complex organisational structures.

Advertising classes

The method of recruitment and process for advertising classes was discussed as an ongoing issue. The initial group of interviews conducted in 1986 was regularly added to through periodic advertising.

> It was decided that broad advertising and interviewing to select students for the coming class would occur. Students who have already attended a basic education class are eligible to be interviewed for the next class.
>
> The advertising and briefings will be held the week beginning 3 July and interviews will be held the week beginning 10 July. (Minutes of the Planning Group, 21 June 1989)

The role of planning group members became known to employees so that, as the reputation of the classes spread, employees asked planning group members to place their names on waiting lists.

Participation of women

The participation rate of women in courses arose as an issue after a woman class participant dropped out of her course; she had been the only woman in a class of ten.

> The issue of the low participation rate of women in the classes was discussed.
>
> *Action:* J. (AMWU representative) agreed to discuss the issue with the VBU and consider some possible affirmative action principles that might be used to encourage greater participation from women. (Minutes of the Planning Group, 22 September 1989)

At the following meeting, it was reported that a woman VBU shop steward had agreed to try and ensure that female employees were encouraged to participate. Subsequent minutes do not record the outcome.

The selection of students

The planning group considered the selection of students for each course. After interviews had been conducted, WBEP presented a list of the names of participants suitable for a particular course; the major problem was how many could be released from the same work area. The planning group found it advisable to ensure that the criteria for selection was widely understood throughout the company:

> Students will be chosen by their educational need, decided by interview, overlaid by the constraints and demands of the companies. Some people have been interviewed for a previous class and they will, where possible, be given priority. Those not selected will be placed on a list for consideration for subsequent classes. Advice will be given on other educational avenues to those people whose needs are not met by this course. (Memo from the Planning Group, 7 March 1988, distributed through the company distribution system)

Negotiation and organisation of time-release

Time-release arrangements were considered at most meetings. In the earlier years of operation in the company, WBEP was required to report in detail on class outcomes at Week 15 and after planning group discussion, one class gained another five weeks life. Once WBEP's credibility was established, the duration of classes was more secure, but time-release still required organisation:

> One class was lost through Cup Day—an extra class was requested before Christmas to make up for this.
>
> L. to ensure time-release available; P. to arrange booking of the room in Plant 4; L. to check availability of cassette player. (Minutes of the Planning Group, 1 December 1989)

Curriculum development

The planning group took its role in the development of curriculum very seriously:

> During the first week of the course, the tutors and students will develop curriculum to suit needs, and the Planning Group will meet in approximately the first week of March to look at this curriculum.

On a number of occasions, the planning group established curriculum working parties:

> The meeting debated whether the company's needs are for:
>
> i) technical reports; specific to the sections needs, or

ii) general writing, spelling skills as well as confidence in committing themselves (sic) to print, or

iii) both of the above

A working party was established to draw up the outline of a course. It will consist of Workplace Project representatives, foremen and supervisors from a range of different areas. To meet 4 February. Examples of actual reports used around the company are to be used.' (Minutes of the Planning Group, 22 January 1988)

The working party's proposed outline was endorsed by the next planning group meeting and was later circulated around the company and displayed on noticeboards with recruitment advertising. The research undertaken by the working party and the material it collected was fed into the curriculum developed by tutors and students when the 'Writing for Reports' class was begun.

Evaluation

In the WBEP model, evaluation of classes takes place in the planning group, during the course and at its conclusion. Evaluation is in terms of the course aims and objectives, which are defined broadly and endorsed by the planning group before the course begins and which may later be refined, or redefined, with planning group's support.

Two principles of evaluation philosophy, which derive from broader adult literacy and basic education practice, inform the method of evaluation in WBEP.

> One is that formal testing is inappropriate as a means of evaluating progress of adult learners in adult literacy and basic education classes. The other is that participants in such classes are guaranteed confidentiality. (Blay 1988, Preface)

These principles are discussed under the heading 'Issues' in this section.

The purposes of the WBEP evaluation process are to:

- develop in students a consciousness of their own learning progress and process;
- assist tutors and the WBEP team in improving curriculum development in the workplace context; and
- document outcomes and provide evidence to the planning group of the value of classes to the workplace.

These correspond to three facets of the evaluation process: students' evaluation, tutors' evaluation and evaluation in the planning group.

Students' evaluation

Class participants are asked to comment on the course content, the style of teaching, methods used, group dynamics, as well as their own assessment of their achievements, rate of progress and changing goals.

The student representative on the planning group is required to present to the planning group a report which represents students' evaluation of the course. The representative is elected by the class. Class time is devoted to the student representative reporting back to the group.

Through ongoing evaluation processes, students learn that their opinion is valued and that constructive criticism is respected. Through the contact with the planning group, they also place their class in the broader context of the workplace: as well as becoming more discerning about education delivery, some class participants take on an advocacy role for literacy and basic education provision in the workplace.

Perhaps most importantly, evaluation, linked as it inevitably is to revision, contributes to students' ability to learn. Class participants are being encouraged to monitor and control their own learning. This is metacognition:

> the idea that we can reflect on and monitor our own learning strategies.
> (McCormack & Pancini 1990, p. 19)

Students are encouraged to become aware of and responsible for the way they approach new ideas.

This development of capacity as learners effects how class participants deal with change and means they are better able to deal with other aspects of workplace skill formation.

Tutors' evaluation

Tutors evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching, the progress of students and the extent to which student and workplace needs are met. Evaluation is an integral part of good teaching practice, essential to curriculum development and determining not only what is taught but what methods are used and the pace of the course.

In the classroom, negotiation of the curriculum occurs through group goal-setting and evaluation. WBEP tutors are encouraged to explain to students what is planned for each session and what methods are being

used. At the end of the session or group of sessions, the tutor seeks evaluative responses from students. Tutors use a variety of evaluation formats. A tutor may:

- write down informal, unsolicited comments from students;
- ask the class, as a whole or in groups, to collate lists of what has been done so far and what needs more work;
- write down or tape class discussion or small group discussion about outcomes of the course;
- periodically request students to complete individual written evaluations of the course content, teaching methods used and his or her own estimation of progress; and
- use comparative questions so that students are more able to voice negative or critical comments, e.g. 'What are the three most useful things you have learned? What are the three least useful?'

Tutors need to keep detailed records of each class and of student progress and student evaluation. In preparing for future classes, tutors inevitably evaluate activities, methods and materials they have used. Tutors also evaluate student progress. To explain progress, tutors frame statements of what students are able to do, or have done as indicators of achievement:

> All students are now able to write brief personal letters and work-related memos with conventional layout and accurate paragraphing. (Report to Planning Group, 1990)

> Two students who previously avoided all writing because of their difficulties with spelling are now able to employ effective strategies for spelling: have-a-go, use of the dictionary, look-cover-say-write-check. (Report to Planning Group, 1985)

Because all WBEP classes are relatively short-term, the notion of the transferability of learning to other areas is particularly important. New skills learned in class time need to be applied outside the classroom if they are to be of lasting value. This coincides with the requirement in most workplaces for concrete evidence which proves that employees have improved as a result of a course—whether they be work-related outcomes or outcomes impacting on personal or community life. For students, the successful application of things learnt in class provides strong affirmation of their capacity as learners.

However, changing a non-writer's self-perception involves a great deal of risk-taking. If an employee writes an incident report at work for the

first time, there may still be spelling errors which a supervisor picks up. One strategy to encourage workers to begin writing on the job, despite the possibility of errors, is openly to discuss mistakes and their relationship to learning. The tutor also introduces evaluation questions which promote an awareness of the need to apply new skills:

- Do you think the course has helped you in your job or outside of work? If yes, can you say how?
- Have you tried to write (e.g. an incident report) at work since we wrote one in class? How did you go?
- Did you post the letter you wrote in class. Have you had a reply yet?

If the questions are raised throughout the course, the discussion which arises from these questions encourages others to 'have a go' and assists establishing changed writing habits.

In interim reports to the planning group, the tutor seeks validation from planning group members that the course is meeting workplace expectations and that the teaching is considered effective. In the final report to the planning group the tutor documents the agreed aims of the course content and methods used to reach those aims, a description of outcomes in educational terms and, where appropriate, without breaching confidentiality, a list of outcomes in terms of application:

> One student has begun to take telephone messages at work.
>
> One student has enrolled at a training course at the local TAFE college. He said the WBEP has given him the confidence and skills to go on to further training. (Report to Planning Group, 1987)

Role of the planning group in evaluation

The planning group evaluates whether a course is meeting the needs of the workplace and how well it meets the needs of employees. The planning group is able to influence the direction of classes and assist WBEP in making the courses more responsive to workplace needs.

The decisions as to whether a provider will continue to conduct classes, whether another provider will be given an opportunity or whether classes will cease entirely, are not decisions which are usually made in the planning group. These decisions are likely to be made by senior personnel who make financial decisions in the organisation and who are unlikely to be members of the planning group. In other words, the planning group evaluation process runs parallel with other processes taking place in the

organisation. However, if planning group members are convinced of the value of the classes for the company and its employees, they become advocates for continuation of the classes in other forums in the organisation.

From the needs survey report, planning group members are aware of the broad aims of a proposed course. Usually, after the course has been going for a few weeks, the tutor and student representative make reports to the planning group, outlining the aims of the course in some detail. At this point, planning group members are asked if there are other aims that should be added, or if there are other types of reading and writing that could be taken up in the class. If other planning group meetings occur during the life of the course, the same process of outlining the aims and seeking to redefine them takes place. WBEP fieldworkers include a 'curriculum input' item on planning group agendas. This process is important, particularly in organisations where basic education provision is new: it may take time for workplace personnel to identify workplace needs and to clarify expectations. Consideration is given to identified workplace needs and constraints as they arise, the learning capacity and likely rate of progress of students and the learning needs and expectations of the students. The aims agreed in the planning group may be challenging but they need to be realistic.

The reports that the tutor and student representative present to the planning group contain details of what has been done and explanations of methodology used. Copies of handouts, texts read in class and information about issues discussed are conveyed in as much detail as the planning group wishes to hear. The reports also give examples of outcomes by describing how the whole class has responded, or outcomes for specific students couched in terms that protect confidentiality.

During planning group evaluation discussions, workplace representatives relate not only what they have observed about students or the class, but also what other people in the organisation (supervisors, workmates or more senior personnel) have been noticing or saying about the class or the students. Questions, concerns and criticism emerge, but so too do satisfaction, encouragement and new suggestions. This is an educational process for workplace personnel and WBEP tutors and staff.

The tutor presents a final report on the class some weeks after the class has finished. The planning group is encouraged to add to the report and to amend or endorse it. In some workplaces, planning group members play an active role in evaluation:

> L. (student representative) is to co-ordinate the gathering of evaluations from supervisors and members of the current class. (Minutes of Planning Group, 1 December 1989)

Planning group members are asked to evaluate and advise on WBEP processes, as well as curriculum and outcomes. This is evident in *Classes at Work* (Steele 1991):

> *Employers, supervisors and production managers* felt that the main long-term benefits were increased worker confidence and assertiveness, as well as increased production and efficiency. Other benefits to workplaces were: better understanding of the production process, improved communication, better applications for positions, the expectation of long-term benefits to the organisation, increased ability to count and to read, improvement in ability to deal with Occupational Health and Safety issues, increased ability to concentrate, and greater flexibility in deploying staff.
>
> Estimates of the cost to employers of having workers in classes varied from nil to $8 000 per class in lost (production) time. Fees were not charged for these classes. Employers commented on a range of issues: some linked improved communication and increased profitability; some noted increased autonomy among workers; some greater efficiency and higher quality work and others the ability and confidence of workers to take on higher duties; all results of employees having attended Basic Education classes. Some difficulties were providing cover to fill workers' places while they were at class, and the time lag which sometimes occurs between interviewing and commencement of a class. One manager felt that classes were too short.
>
> *Shop stewards and union representatives* indicated that as a result of classes there was increased personal confidence, improved communication and increased participation in the workplace, including in union meetings. (Steele 1991, p. 13)

Issues

The WBEP model of provision raises issues which directly relate to how programs are established in the workplace. The issues discussed here are:

- voluntary participation
- open access
- confidentiality
- negotiated worktime
- assessment and formal testing

Voluntary participation

An adult's readiness to return to study is dependent on a multiplicity of factors including work-related matters, his or her domestic situation, and emotional and psychological factors. The best person to judge readiness is the potential student. If an adult is fearful of failing because he or she remembers failing at school, insistence that he or she goes to class is likely to increase anxiety and be counterproductive. Adults returning to learning need to start with a sense of control over their learning and responsibility for their continuing education.

Open access

Open advertising (printed material and face-to-face discussions) gives a clear message that basic education is an opportunity open to all and that union, management and the basic education provider are all actively encouraging people to participate. WBEP proceeds with advertising only after agreement is reached that all those who have needs which can be met by basic education will have an opportunity to do a course in worktime, although some classes take priority over others and will run first. Decisions about which classes get priority are made by the planning group. The aim is to prevent basic education classes becoming enmeshed in personal or industrial issues in the workplace. The credibility of classes is threatened if access to classes appears to be based on criteria that are unclear or in forums that are secret. The open process contributes to the widespread acceptance of basic education provision.

The selection of students for classes is based on educational criteria. The assessments that are made in the needs survey interviews provide the data that enables WBEP to group potential students according to broad educational levels and their expectations of the course. Criteria that a company might use for other decisions, for example work record, potential for promotion, are not used.

Confidentiality

Information about individual students, gained in interviews and in class, remains confidential to the WBEP staff and tutors. This is a response to the educational and industrial sensitivity of illiteracy. Many people who are unable to read and write or who have a low level of writing skills have managed to hide this effectively; although they may be very capable as workers and citizens, lack of basic education skills is often a source of

embarrassment. Without the blanket of confidentiality many of those most in need would not volunteer for the needs survey or participate in classes.

In addition to these educational considerations, the industrial and economic climate contributes to the need to maintain confidentiality. When industry restructuring may result in loss of jobs for some and training and retraining for others, those people who lack basic education skills may feel more vulnerable. Some believe that lack of language and literacy is likely to be a factor in considerations of who is made redundant. This may be true or not. It is, in fact, an industrial issue and one that an education provider properly has no part in. However, the perception of potential students—that by admitting to low basic education skills they are more vulnerable—*is* an issue for basic education providers. This perception and suspicion is likely to work against the efforts of the basic education provider to encourage workers to return to study.

Negotiated worktime

Learning to read and write is intellectually demanding for most adults. Classes need to be held at a time when employees are not too tired to concentrate. This need has to be balanced against the workplace's operational requirements and other constraints affecting paid time-release.

The majority of WBEP classes are held for two or three hours in the morning. Classes involving shift workers are more difficult and a variety of more complex time-release arrangements are negotiated, such as alternating the days of classes to follow the pattern of shift workers' rosters. On other occasions, shift workers attend outside worktime but are usually paid for the additional time spent in class.

One option explored by WBEP in the early years was 'half-in, half-out', the last hour of work and one hour of the employee's own time. The attraction of this formula is that employees are evidently committed to the class if they are prepared to put in an hour of unpaid time. Employers who have suggested this model have usually been more concerned about genuine commitment to study rather than seeking to halve the cost of paid time-release. However, an employee's commitment is also demonstrated by the development of home study habits and willingness to use newly learned reading and writing at work or in other areas of daily life. Homework and use of new skills are actively encouraged by WBEP tutors.

'Half-in, half-out' classes trialled by WBEP were found to be less stable and students less receptive than at other times of the day. Employees cited exclusion from overtime rosters and disruption of car pool arrangements. Workers with childcare arrangements that could not be

changed were excluded from participation. With the exception of the last matter, which involves discrimination against women predominantly, the issue of classes being held fully in worktime is about optimum time for study and the practicalities affecting the stability of a class rather than a matter of principle.

Assessment and formal testing

Most adults who lack literacy skills have experienced tests as reinforcement of some degree of failure at reading, writing or maths. Testing and pass or fail assessment on exit from a basic education class acts as a deterrent to returning to study for those who have not developed confidence in their learning capacities.

Nonetheless, the issue is not clear-cut and as implementation of the national training agenda gathers pace, the demand for assessment and accreditation of basic education comes from several directions:

- Employers often feel more convinced of an assessment process that is linked with an externally set standard, rather than comparing an employee's competencies after the class with his or her competencies before the class.
- Many students in WBEP classes have requested some form of certificate which can be shown as evidence of achievement and work completed.
- Unions have voiced discontent with short courses which do not provide any form of accreditation. For many of their members, the perception is that short courses count for nothing.

There is also pressure from some government bodies to rank students (or employees who may not intend to become students) on numerical scales, such as Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) and Adult Literacy and Numeracy (ALAN) scales. While both these scales are considered by some to have merit as an assessment tool for placement and are being increasingly used in skills audits, their value in assessing outcomes of a course is limited. In some quarters, the 'scientific' reassurance of numbers has more credibility than evidence of applied reading and writing.

Currently, the work being done on the Adult Basic Education Accreditation Frameworks Project (Bradshaw 1992) holds the promise of becoming a tool to assess reading and writing competence and after further

development, a system of formal accreditation for adult literacy and basic education. No such suitable system exists at present.

In the current context, the question with assessment and accreditation is no longer whether they have a place but how they should be done, using what system, for what purposes and to what extent can or should the principle of confidentiality be maintained.

Summary

In this section, features of the WBEP model examined were the needs survey, the planning group and the evaluation process. The issues most commonly raised about the model were discussed: voluntary participation, open access, confidentiality, negotiated worktime, and assessment and formal testing.

Aspects of the WBEP model which were challenged in 1984 are now widely accepted practice, particularly the involvement of unions in education and training. At the same time, WBEP staff constantly reflect on the model's effectiveness and appropriateness. New developments in education and changes in the industrial context require considered responses.

CURRICULUM

The discussion of WBEP curriculum falls into three main parts:

- Curriculum development—which includes an explanation of how WBEP views curriculum and learning in groups, and an examination of the roles of tutors, students and the planning group in negotiating the curriculum.
- A writing class in action—where what is done in a class is discussed in detail.
- Literacy in the workplace—which covers the concepts of literacy which inform WBEP practice.

Curriculum development

Curriculum is not static; it is constantly in the process of development so that it becomes a more effective vehicle for learning. The Latin word 'curriculum' means a *running, course, race, race chariot*. These days it has many meanings: the broad outline of a course of study at a university, frameworks and guidelines produced for teachers in schools, a complete training package including content, timelines, handouts and promised outcomes sold to employers. The heart of the debate about curriculum is not only its definition and what it contains. Other considerations are central to the issue. Who develops curriculum? What constraints are there on course content? What is the role of the tutor and what role do students have in determining curriculum? Is curriculum designed by an 'expert', implemented by the tutor and consumed by the student?

In WBEP, curriculum is seen as a dynamic, evolving process focusing on the learning of students and their literacy development. The curriculum is inseparable from the context in which learning takes place and draws on the culture in which learners move. In the curriculum development process the student is an active participant.

Not a package but a process

In publicity material and in discussions with employers, WBEP fieldwork officers always explain that there is no set curriculum for WBEP courses, and no package of adult basic education ready for delivery. Employers sometimes find this unsatisfactory, particularly if they are used to knowing exactly what they are buying and the precise benefits they might expect to get for an investment.

As described in the last chapter, WBEP asks for employer and union participation in curriculum development. The broad aims of a course are agreed by members of the planning group. The details of course content, the pace of the course and the more detailed aims of the course are negotiated between tutor and students. Regular reports to the planning group allow for comment, criticism and further input into the curriculum. Critical to the success of this process is an atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill in the planning group and an ongoing commitment from tutors that they are learners as well as experts in their field, and therefore need to listen not only to their students but also to planning group members and other relevant workplace personnel.

The role of tutors

When WBEP tutors develop curriculum for a class they draw from their repertoire of knowledge and experience to decide how best to teach and promote effective learning. They exercise judgment in defining student needs and in shaping the course. They monitor the participation of each student and the nature of group dynamics. They seek to balance the learning needs of individuals with the needs of the group. The role of the tutor is central to the WBEP model.

Teaching in the workplace is particularly demanding. Tutors aim to achieve much in the limited time available. They must be sensitive to an environment where the students work every day and the tutor is the outsider; they need to use the work environment to develop curriculum; they must be aware of the political constraints affecting their role in the workplace.

An infrastructure which provides tutors with ongoing training, professional development and curriculum support is necessary. WBEP conducts its own training and induction program for experienced basic education tutors who are selected to work in WBEP.

To prevent isolation and to promote sound curriculum development, WBEP frequently employs team-teaching. Curriculum development officers and resources officers are available to assist and support tutors. Paid tutors'

meetings, with an in-service component, and time allotted for tutors to talk about what has been happening in their classes, are held regularly. (For more detail about the range of in-service and support for tutors, see Ennis 1991.)

Learning in groups

In the WBEP model, employees are usually organised into small learning groups of six to twelve students. Within this class context, individual students may work on a specific task with self-paced learning materials, or at times be working on a specific task which is different from that being undertaken by anyone else in the group. Smaller subgroups of two's or three's may form around particular topics from time to time. Usually the whole class comes together at key points of each session. This fluidity enables the pursuit of individual learning needs and also fosters dialogue between class members. Students in group learning situations enhance each other's learning progress.

The Small Group Learning Methodology Project undertaken by the Workplace Basic Education Department defined group learning in the following manner:

> Group learning doesn't take place when a group of people sit passively listening to a teacher talking to them. That's a form of one-to-one learning, and a restricted one at that. Group learning is much more than a collection of individuals sharing the same space. The group becomes an integral part of learning. Each student learns through and in the group in a rich and complex pattern of interaction. (Ennis & Davison 1988, p. 11)

Developing a curriculum which meets individual and group needs requires the creation of group goals which are redefined throughout the courses.

> An awareness of individual students' needs based on initial pre-class interviews, one-to-one discussions, group discussions and activities combine to create group goals which can be reviewed, expanded, changed or modified ... Student feedback on appropriateness of approaches, tasks and activities is gained by formal (discussion, evaluation surveys, negotiation procedures) and informal (non-verbal, incidental, intuitive, behavioural) means. (Ennis & Davison 1988, p. 22)

Literacy work in groups is thus able to meet individual needs. Open-ended activities and extension work allow class participants to work at their own pace. Learning in groups also enables people to learn skills which

cannot be learnt in isolation in a language laboratory or from a textbook of programmed instruction:

> From the work of Johnson and Johnson (1975) and others, it is apparent that learning co-operatively in small groups makes a dramatic difference to a range of learning outcomes. It promotes:
>
> - higher achievement and creative productivity
> - divergent thinking and effective problem-solving
> - thinking skills at higher cognitive levels
> - intrinsic motivation
> - positive self-esteem
> - effective social skills
> - mutual respect and concern for each other
> - acceptance and understanding of individual differences.
>
> (Dalton 1988, p. 9)

Negotiation and development of the curriculum

The aim of negotiating the curriculum for each specific course is to meet more effectively the needs of each individual student, of each group of students and of each workplace.

Workplace personnel, such as training officers, supervisors and union representatives, are asked to suggest specific areas which could be studied and which would be of mutual benefit to the organisation and to students. The organisation-specific nature of much workplace written communication, such as reports and forms, means that actual workplace texts need to be used as models (although not exclusively so).

In addition to the workplace's expressed needs, the curriculum is shaped by other aspects of the workplace context, including:

- the nature of work performed and products produced;
- industry-wide developments and issues which impact on the workplace;
- the location and physical environment of the workplace;
- work practices and processes;
- the industrial relations climate; and
- organisation and structures in the workplace.

This process of negotiation and development of the curriculum encourages class participants to be more aware of how they learn and what roles and responsibilities they have in managing their own learning.

Student input into curriculum development, begun at the needs survey interview, continues throughout the course. Class participants voice their own reading and writing difficulties, the perceived expectations of the organisation, their aspirations for further training or promotion, and what they need to write and read on the job, at home or in the community.

Finally, in the negotiation and development of curriculum, the tutor takes the ultimate responsibility. The tutor has a key role in:

- reporting to the planning group and seeking information, direction and evaluation;
- reporting to the WBEP team and receiving curriculum development support as a member of that team, and in drawing from a knowledge of theoretical and practical developments in the adult literacy and basic education field; and, perhaps most importantly
- listening for and interpreting student need and judging the best way to teach and promote student learning.

A writing class in action

A written lesson plan is unable to capture the dynamics of a group of adult learners in class—the way learning takes place, the exchange of ideas, the hesitancy and enthusiasm of students or the beginning attempts at writing. Nor does it provide a recipe for someone else to follow. However, it does open a window on a key aspect of curriculum development.

This class took place in 1991 in a manufacturing company in Melbourne. The tutor was Rex Ennis, an adult education officer with WBEP. This was the fifth session in a thirty-week course. Classes were held for three hours, one morning a week.

The company had approached WBEP to conduct a needs survey and to provide reading and writing courses for employees. There were plans to introduce multi-skilling and broader job designs as part of restructuring the company. A new company procedures manual had been written and it was intended to use this for training employees and to develop new job designs. It was evident that the language used in the manual was such that many employees would be unable to read it. The company had also identified some inefficiencies in production resulting from inadequate reading and writing skills of employees, for example batch card inaccuracies, quality control.

The relevant unions supported the courses and were represented on the planning group.

There were twelve students in the class. They were all employed as production workers where they were required to handle some chemicals. The ethnic mix in the class included Macedonians, Croats, Turks, Italians, Cypriots. One student had an English-speaking background. Some tensions existed amongst employees on the shop floor and these flowed over into the classroom. The dynamics of the class were complex and at times difficult. A wide diversity of educational needs existed: one man was a complete non-reader-writer, another could write reasonably independently, other class members could fill in familiar forms but were unable to write connected sentences.

Week five is fairly early in the life of a class. The earlier direction in lessons had been established by Rex's assessment of the interview forms and his knowledge of planning group discussions around the needs survey and his experience and professional judgment. Students had completed writing an autobiographical text and had been introduced to speed copying, drafting, editing and modelling.

Session plan

8.50 a.m.	1.	*Settle in. Welcome. Feedback*
8.55 a.m.	2.	Today's plan on board
9.00 a.m.	3a.	Check homework
	3b.	Checklist of reading/writing
9.20 a.m.	4.	Speed copying (10 mins) own choice *(Suggest instruction model)*
9.30 a.m.	5.	'Getting to work' pieces—read, check, show
9.40 a.m.	6.	'Going home'—model; keywords and phrases
9.50–10 a.m.		*Break*
10.30 a.m.	7.	Instructions
	7a.	Refer to kite/fish—note structure/content
	7b.	Read and discuss pasta sauce—pick out basis of recipe, underline
	7c.	Write own instructions—in pairs
	8.	Spelling practice
	9.	Perhaps another piece from *Caught In Between*

Activity 1: Settle in. Welcome. Feedback

The tutor aims to create a relaxed, friendly atmosphere where workers are encouraged to converse and express ideas.

Activity 2: Today's plan

The tutor explains what is planned for today's session. Class members are asked whether they are happy with the plan, whether they wish to add or change anything.

Class members are being encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning, to reflect on what they need or want to do and to listen to the views of others. At a number of points throughout this session they will have to make choices about what work they are doing. This challenges the concept that they can sit back and be 'taught' a parcel of knowledge. The aim is to encourage active learning.

Activity 3a: Check homework

In Session 4, there had been a discussion on the importance of frequent study and how much students forget if they only open their folders during class. In subsequent sessions, Rex continued to encourage homework and frequent reading at home.

Encouragement of work between classes is seen as very important by WBEP tutors but they also appreciate the quite considerable hurdles some adults returning to study have to overcome in order to study at home. Some adult students, particularly those embarrassed by lack of reading and writing skills, are uncomfortable being seen carrying books outside the classroom. Some are ashamed to study at home where their children are sitting down to VCE assignments. Furthermore:

> Finding this [study] time is an act of major ethical significance for family life because it disrupts long-established patterns. Demanding the time, place, quiet and freedom from interruption necessary for studying places severe restraints on the spontaneous patterns of interaction with other family members—children, partners and friends. The psychic and physical withdrawal necessary for this study is easily read as rejection, aloofness or reneging on taken-for-granted roles, responsibilities and relationships (McCormack & Pancini 1990, p. 5)

By the end of this course, all students had done some work at home and some were studying regularly. This is the case in most WBEP classes.

Activity 3b: Checklist of reading and writing

At the conclusion of Session 4, students were asked to note down all the reading and writing they did during the week. Rex compiles this list on the board as students talk about what they have been reading and writing:

reading	*writing*
batchcards	*dockets — breakdown*
newspapers	*—maintenance*
roadsigns	*recording dipping tanks*
distance directions	*product names in book*
labels	*filling in slips*
graffiti	*Workcare*
meters/gauges	*accident form*
instructions	*shift report*
worksheets	*record waste solvents*
Tattslotto tickets	*letters*
phone messages	*Tattslotto*
	shopping list
	phone messages
	banking
	school notes

This activity accomplishes a number of important steps in learning and in developing the curriculum.

Class members have to reflect on their own literacy activity at work and home, and elsewhere. It affirms that they are already reading, writing, thinking about and communicating ideas; those who perceive themselves as non-readers or non-writers are forced to begin re-assessing that perception. If they have been blind to all printed matter, listening to others talk about their daily reading and writing provides a trigger for them to begin looking around and reading.

The activity also maximises the use of class time by making class activities spill over into work and home. In addition, normal daily activities become the subject of study. Learning is occurring not just in class or at home but becomes a conscious part of daily life.

The tutor is also able to build on this list each week and design specific activities around the wealth of material it provides, for example: What vocabulary is used on maintenance dockets? What is the purpose of the waste solvent record? What needs to be written there?

Activity 4: Speed copying

In this activity, students copy without stopping for ten minutes, choosing any text they wish. The tutor suggests they could use the instruction model.

Speed copying was introduced in the first session and continued throughout the course; halfway through the course a number of class members had switched to speed writing. With these activities, adults who

are unused to writing become more relaxed with the physical aspects of writing and get more flow into their handwriting. The structures, phrases and words of the genre they are copying become more familiar. The tutor suggests that people try 'chunking', that is move from copying word-for-word (or part of a word) to copying blocks of words of increasing length. This develops memory, particularly sight memory, and improves spelling.

Activity 5 and 6: Individual writing

Each class participant completed a piece of writing entitled 'Getting to work' in Session 4. They worked through a number of drafts, discussing them with Rex and beginning to self-correct. The pieces have since been typed up. Everyone is asked to proofread the typed copy and those who wish to, read theirs to the group.

Rex provides a model text 'Going home'. Key words and phrases are picked out. The structure of the piece is discussed. Everyone writes the first draft of their own 'Going home'.

We learn to write by writing, not by being given a handout on how to do it. The tutor is utilising a 'process writing' approach and knowledge of genre theory to promote a more effective development of writing, to encourage students' confidence in writing and to develop a critical awareness of what writing involves. Students experience early success at a task they previously avoided—writing connected sentences. The class becomes the audience, where they receive affirmation and learn from each other. The second piece 'Going home' builds nicely on vocabulary and structures used in 'Getting to work' and as such encourages more independent writing. It is an open-ended activity—three or four sentences are as acceptable as half a page.

In choosing these topics, Rex wanted a familiar subject which also involved time sequencing. Writing a time sequence is one of the structures the class members would need to use in documenting the processes of their own jobs.

Activity 7: Instructions

The tutor revises work done on instructions for making a kite and for eating a fish, noting structure, layout, content, language. A class member is asked to relate how to make pasta sauce. The class members assist Rex in getting the sequence of the recipe correct as he writes it on the board. Structure is noted and key steps underlined. Students then work in pairs to write a recipe of their own choice.

The dynamics of the class shifted from quiet individual writing, about 'Going home', to tutor instruction, listening to a class member and then full class participation in a writing activity and then to pair work: again this

constituted more practice in writing and a focus on meaning and the structure of a genre that is found in the production manual.

The content of the instructions were deliberately chosen—the instructions in the company's training manual were too complex and the language too difficult at this stage. Between Sessions 4 and 5, one man had taken the kite instructions home and built a kite for his son. Another man worked in the evenings in a fish restaurant and could inject some humour into the fish eating instructions. The one Italian in the group had not contributed to class discussion, until on this occasion when he was able to speak to the whole group about making pasta sauce.

The pairing off to write instructions broke up some of the established cliques in the group (partly formed around ethnic origin) and encouraged a more cooperative learning environment.

Activity 8: Spelling practice

This was a brief regular activity where each person learnt words they had difficulties with in earlier writing activities.

Activity 9: Reading—Caught In Between

The tutor reads aloud initially and asks students to follow the text. As the story develops, Rex invites students to read along with him.

Caught In Between is a collection of stories or personal accounts written by migrants to Australia about the difficulties they experienced moving from one culture to another. This subject matter raises issues of migration, one's own culture and Australian culture and is of high interest value to members of this class.

Interconnections for literacy development

In conclusion, this examination of a WBEP class illustrates the connections that the tutor needs to make to promote literacy development. Interconnections are made between the students' worlds of work and home and community life, and between the personal and the public. While the main focus of the course is on 'Literacy for knowledge' and 'Literacy for practical purposes' (see Figure 2), other areas of comprehensive literacy are dealt with. The session links listening, teaching, reading aloud, discussing and drawing conclusions. It also links reading, writing, knowledge and ideas and strengthens conceptual development. The content of the session is a response to workplace agendas and the students' needs as people and as workers.

Literacy in the workplace

Classes conducted by WBEP are usually given names such as 'Brush up your reading and writing skills', 'Writing for specific purposes', 'General maths' or even 'Writing 1' (meaning the first writing class conducted at that workplace). The term 'basic education' in WBEP includes language and maths skills encompassing beginners to pre-VCE. The scope of the project, therefore, also includes a return to study component.

While specific titles are used to name classes, the work of WBEP and the curriculum development it encourages are informed by a broad concept of literacy. WBEP recognises that:

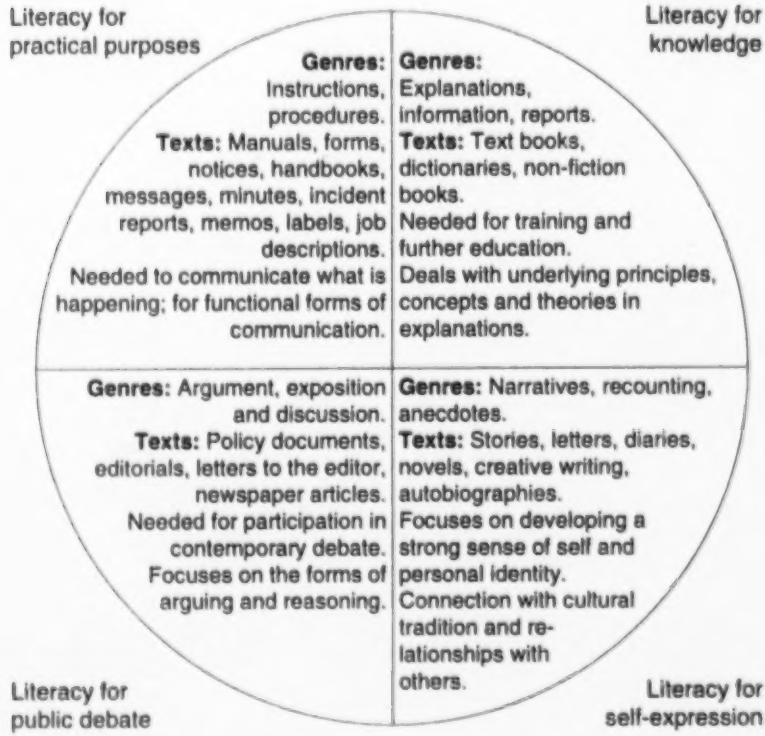
- Reading, writing, speaking, listening and conceptual development are interrelated and enrich each other. Literacy deals with a whole spectrum and complexity of making meaning and communicating.
- An adult learner interreacts with a variety of contexts (home, work, the past), reflecting on and making meaning in, between and across those contexts.
- Adults gain an understanding of their capacity as learners by increasing reading, writing, speaking and listening practice inside and outside the classroom.
- The starting point is always where the student is, not where we (tutor, planning group, society) think they should be.
- Recognition of prior learning is not confined to the first lesson; it affects the whole process of how learning and teaching take place.

The Adult Basic Education Accreditation Framework Project—Draft Competence Statements for Adult Reading and Writing (Bradshaw 1992) proposes a model of comprehensive literacy which describes the way literacy is conceptualised in many areas of adult literacy and basic education. Bradshaw proposes a comprehensive literacy model comprising four distinctive but interrelated literacies. These four literacies are associated with four different purposes for reading, writing, speaking and listening. The four literacies are:

- literacy for self-expression
- literacy for practical purposes
- literacy for knowledge
- literacy for participation in public debate

The four literacies are not 'autonomous' components that exist apart from each other. Figure 2 illustrates these four literacies and the common genres and representative text types found in each.

Figure 2 Comprehensive literacy


Literacy for practical purposes
Genres: Instructions, procedures.
Texts: Manuals, forms, notices, handbooks, messages, minutes, incident reports, memos, labels, job descriptions.
Needed to communicate what is happening; for functional forms of communication.
Literacy for knowledge
Genres: Explanations, information, reports.
Texts: Text books, dictionaries, non-fiction books.
Needed for training and further education.
Deals with underlying principles, concepts and theories in explanations.
Genres: Argument, exposition and discussion.
Texts: Policy documents, editorials, letters to the editor, newspaper articles.
Needed for participation in contemporary debate.
Focuses on the forms of arguing and reasoning.
Literacy for public debate
Genres: Narratives, recounting, anecdotes.
Texts: Stories, letters, diaries, novels, creative writing, autobiographies.
Focuses on developing a strong sense of self and personal identity.
Connection with cultural tradition and relationships with others.
Literacy for self-expression

Each of the four literacies has relevance to the workplace. Workplace communications include many examples of literacy for practical purposes: instructions, labels, batchcards, incident and accident reports, memos. In 1988, WBEP established a curriculum development team which over a number of months researched educational methods, interviewed workplace staff and developed a range of teaching strategies to assist tutors to teach the genre of 'reports' more effectively.

Teaching literacy for self-expression is often favoured as a less threatening starting point for adults returning to study. A 'strong sense of

self and personal identity' underpins learning capacity and conceptual development. For adults who have migrated to Australia, texts in this literacy provide opportunities for affirmation of cultural traditions and exploration of cross-cultural issues.

> Issues of a cross-cultural nature inevitably affect the process and *success* of language learning. (Wajnryb 1991, p. 5)

Furthermore, in group learning situations where reading and writing in this literacy is discussed, a contribution to cultural sensitivity and multiculturalism takes place. Other aspects of workplace culture arise in this area of literacy. Many WBEP writing classes have produced booklets of student writing which contain creative writing about work, the workplace's physical environment, anecdotes and stories.

As regards literacy for public debate, discussion of issues of public concern stimulates students to express ideas more clearly and to reason more effectively. The capacity to listen for and critically appraise the lines of reasoning in an argument affects the ability to weigh up issues and discuss a topic constructively. Intolerance, prejudice and false assumptions are challenged. One view is that employers do not want workers to reason and discuss but to just do the job. In WBEP experience, most employers reject the 'worker as robot' model and recognise that new models of working call for the capacities described in this literacy. Issues of direct relevance to the workplace are only dealt with in WBEP classes when the planning group has suggested this and provided some guidance about the topic.

Lastly, class participants are taught strategies to assist comprehension of texts and how to extract relevant information—literacy for knowledge. Increased confidence in the capacity to learn and the development of efficient study habits has enabled many WBEP students to participate later in training programs.

Most WBEP classes are 'broad-based' literacy classes which allow tutors to teach comprehensive literacy. Reading and writing topics are not often exclusively work-related. The choice of topics may stem from the students' interests or suggestion, or may be driven by the need to develop reading and writing habits which will continue after the class has been completed. Developing pleasure in reading is one example—students are encouraged to borrow novels, autobiographies and non-fiction books from the WBEP resource collection and read them at home.

Reading and discussing newspaper articles is another example. Similarly, if opportunities to keep using newly learnt writing skills at work appear to be limited, in the short-term at least, WBEP tutors teach related

genres and encourage students to find other avenues for regular writing (Elias 1988).

While each literacy needs to be taught so that students are able to identify consciously and draw on the appropriate domains and genres in context, the four literacies are interconnected and inseparable. Like aspects of human life they overlap and influence each other. Movement from one to the other occurs naturally.

A great deal of talking and listening takes place in literacy classes: discussion arises out of and leads into all four literacies. While usually harnessed to stimulate reading and writing, such discussion is valuable in its own right. In class discussion, understanding is broadened and deepened, ideas are challenged and clarified. Students move from the concrete to abstract thought; from the individual and personal to generalisations and applications to others. Conceptual development, critical and creative thinking, in discussion and in writing, are the scaffolding around which comprehensive literacy develops.

Conclusion

The question 'What is the best way to promote adult learning?' is a perennial one and if the answers are rarely definitive, the search for answers informs good teaching practice. In the workplace where literacy practice comes into closer contact with industry training, the debate is thrown into sharper focus.

In the early years, tutors in WBEP classes, like literacy tutors elsewhere, tended to focus on personal expressive writing and the language experience approach. Literacy for self-expression remains important but, in addition, WBEP tutors have had to develop strategies and investigate methods for teaching those forms of reading and writing most commonly used in the workplace, such as memo and report writing.

The process of curriculum development described in this section has enabled WBEP tutors to respond to the workplace context. The comprehensive literacy concept provides an external framework within which curriculum development and evaluation can occur. However, a central principle of the WBEP model is that curriculum can always be improved and will always need fresh development to be effective in an ever-changing world, and with each group of students.

TAKING STOCK

The Workplace Basic Education Project grew from three effective full-time (EFT) staff and a handful of tutors in 1984, to 7.8 EFT staff and a large but fluctuating body of experienced sessional tutors at the end of 1991. WBEP delivers an increasing number of classes each year and conducts a growing range of research and development projects. The expansion of program delivery is, to some extent, made possible by charging employers for needs surveys, consultation and provision of classes. The increase in project work is possible because of government money being injected into the area through the Workplace English Language and Literacy Program (federal), via Industry Training Boards (state) and from other sources such as the Victorian Education Foundation.

In this final section, some of the trends evident in WBEP's operations are considered: the participation of women, the nature and place of reading and writing in industry, the place of maths in workplace provision and the growth of training expertise. The section concludes with a brief discussion of some of the strengths of the model.

Participation rate of women

In the early years, the work on women and maths undertaken by WBEP staff focused on the development of curriculum which recognised that women responded to problem-solving and cooperative models of learning rather than the competitive, individualised models of learning traditionally associated with mathematics teaching. Consideration of curriculum and learning models appropriate to women is an issue that needs further work across all adult basic education areas.

However, these important issues have been overshadowed by the realisation that, at a time when it has become easier to negotiate paid time-release in many workplaces, the participation rate of women in WBEP classes has declined in recent years:

Year	% of women students
1989	40%
1990	35%
1991	27%

Without further research, it is not possible to pinpoint reasons for this decline. It may be a simple explanation, that is a couple of workplaces with a high percentage of women employees closed down or stopped providing classes. However, the WBEP trend may well reflect trends in the participation of women in formal training and skills acquisition (see O'Connor 1991; Gaskell 1991).

It is clear that the drop in the participation rate of women coincided with the changing nature of fieldwork; whereas fieldworkers once initiated contact, they now respond to requests from employers. Once alerted to the participation figures, WBEP staff have developed fieldwork plans to redress the gender imbalance.

Ongoing monitoring of participation rates is indicated for the future. Research into participation rates for women in programs conducted by other providers would be very useful.

The place of reading and writing in workplace training

With the recent expansion of workplace basic education has come a variety of providers, models of delivery and a range of views about literacy provision. The documentation of these includes the Workplace Learning Centre (Virgona 1992); Workforce Literacy Training Package (DEET 1991); the work on the communication needs of checkout operators (Searle 1991); and the multi-layered, industry-wide provision recommended for the vehicle industry (Sefton & O'Hara 1992). This last report addresses the need to train the non-trades workforce in the Vehicle Industry Certificate (VIC) as quickly as possible, fast-tracking wherever possible.

These are exciting developments in the workplace basic education field. However, with the exception of Virgona, these writers have raised questions about the place and nature of literacy provision in industry. Should employees be taught only the reading and writing they need for their current job, or for the training course they are about to do? Should literacy 'competence' become a prerequisite for entry to base-level training courses? Does this result in educationally disadvantaged people being excluded from training and award-related pay increases? Why teach writing at all if workers are not required to write in their jobs?

The work of WBEP rests on the understanding that literacy is necessary in today's changing world and is essential for long-term development. In the short-term, it may be appropriate to devise strategies which enable workers to undertake training courses without addressing their literacy needs. Nonetheless, literacy is important in people's lives. It has a key role in determining how we go about our daily lives, including how we perform our work. Literacy is closely linked to learning capacity, not only at the level of self-perception but also at a practical level; if we can write, we can take notes, summarise and read actively.

The place of maths in basic education

It is often easier to gain support for language, reading and writing provision in workplaces than for maths classes. The public is more aware of the difficulties experienced by people who cannot read and write than the problems arising from a lack of numeracy.

Sound maths skills are essential to successful completion of many training programs. Therefore, it is ironic that the number of maths classes conducted by WBEP fell during 1990–1991, the period when the demand for basic education provision rose because of increased interest and activity in training.

Research shows a high incidence of inadequate maths skills. In No Single *Measure*, 31% of those surveyed were unable to calculate change from $5; 43% could not calculate the cost of a meal when a 10% surcharge applied (Wickert 1991, pp.21–3).

As with the participation rate of women, WBEP staff recognise the need for active fieldwork strategies. An ongoing education campaign may be necessary to increase awareness of the need for adult maths classes.

The growth of training expertise

Since its inception, WBEP has worked closely with training departments in workplaces. The training officer has often been the key contact person. WBEP staff have learnt about some of the challenges facing training officers and considered some of the issues of interface between basic education and training.

The nature of training programs have varied from one workplace to another. In some organisations, training programs have been well developed and clearly focused. At the other end of the spectrum, WBEP has often been

invited into a company in recognition of the need for training but training plans have been in the very early stages of development. Because of rapid technological developments, the skills and training needed by employees are constantly changing. There is enormous pressure on many training officers.

WBEP have been informed about developments in training through workplace planning groups and through discussion with workplace training personnel. In addition, WBEP staff have been involved in projects across a number of industries: food, health, transport, electrical and manufacturing. The project work has included skills task analysis, developmental work on skills audits, research into the numeracy requirements and needs across an industry. This developmental work reflects a shift from enterprise or workplace-level focus to an industry-wide focus.

Important curriculum development still needs to be done to enable workers to participate fully in training and to apply what is learnt in a situation of constant change. Experimentation and evaluation of different models of delivery lies ahead. While a major role remains for the stand-alone basic education class, such as WBEP usually conducts, there is an increasing role for basic education provision to integrate with training.

Strengths

The Workplace Basic Education Project was a pioneer in basic education provision in the workplace. Its ability to change and grow in an ever-changing and competitive environment can be attributed to the principles and practice which inform the WBEP model.

The democratic principles and participative processes, which are integral to the WBEP model, draw on available resources and encourage commitment from participants, whether they be students or planning group members. In the workplace where industrial relations are such an important part of social and personal relationships, tripartite decision-making has enabled the smooth conduct of classes and has established the credibility of workplace language and literacy provision.

The WBEP processes imply a willingness to listen, learn and change on the part of tutors and literacy workers. In considering changes in relation to established WBEP procedures, the main considerations are whether proposed change will adversely affect student learning or the long-term credibility of workplace language and literacy provision. So, the issue of confidentiality is carefully protected, but WBEP does whatever it can to accommodate shift workers, ability ranges in classes or changing needs of

the organisation. Nowhere is this preparedness to listen and change more evident than in curriculum development.

Finally, the conceptual framework of literacy which underpins WBEP work leads to wholeness rather than fragmentation. In curriculum, the comprehensive literacy circle provides a framework for the development of integrated and expanding literacy. This does not mean that WBEP tutors aim to teach comprehensive literacy in a forty-hour or even hundred-hour course; comparatively short courses have a specific focus and realistic aims. However, the comprehensive literacy framework is recognised by the tutor, informs how explanations are made to students and how students map out their own development of literacy.

This conceptual framework leading to wholeness draws on earlier developments in adult literacy: students are regarded as people whose lives have many facets which are interdependent. Effectiveness and efficiency at work are affected by what happens in other parts of a person's life. Skills and creativity learnt at home or leadership qualities developed in the community can enhance performance at work. WBEP aims to provide basic education to people as workers, focusing on work and yet encompassing the needs and potential in other areas of students' lives.

APPENDIX

Extract from 'Principles of Workplace Basic Education'

2. PROCESSES

2.1 Tripartite Planning Groups

An essential element of Workplace Basic Education is the Planning Group involving students, tutors, project staff, employers and unions. At each workplace where the Project operates the group meets at approximately 3 month intervals, unless urgent matters require more frequent meeting. At the meetings needs are discussed, courses prioritised, recruitment procedure determined and outcomes evaluated.

All parties on the Planning Group are involved in:

- dissemination of information about the Project
- determining the process of needs assessment and recruitment of applicants
- prioritizing courses
- determining broad curriculum areas in response to workplace needs
- facilitating smooth operation of classes
- evaluation of the outcome of classes

2.2 Union Involvement

Workplace Basic Education Project runs classes in workplaces where unions are involved in the program. Those unions will be involved in the program, by representation in the Planning Group.

'In principle' and practical support for our work at any workplace is sought through the unions at the state level and through direct communication with the Shop Committee.

2.3 *Employers Contribution*

Employers contribute by providing time release for employees to attend classes, and suitable classroom facilities. In 1991 a cost recovery pilot program was run where some employers paid part or all tutor costs. The cost recovery policy is in draft form. Workplace Basic Education Project believes that 2 principles should guide further cost recovery:

- some social justice classes should be provided cost free
- infrastructure costs should continue to be funded

Employers are represented on the Planning Group - often by Training Personnel. Where appropriate a supervisor's representative is desirable.

3. WORKPLACE ISSUES

3.1 *Worktime*

Classes are conducted in negotiated paid work time. Shift workers attend classes in paid time, although the class may not be during their shift time.

3.2 *Open Recruitment*

Participation in Workplace Basic Education classes is open to all employees at a workplace and is voluntary. Opportunities for basic education are openly advertised in the workplaces. Educational need is the principal criterion used when assessing applicants' suitability for classes.

3.3 *Length of Classes*

Classes vary in length depending on the nature of the workplace and the needs of the employees. Most basic education classes are 30 weeks by 3 hours. No literacy class is less than 2 hours a week for twenty weeks.

3.4 *Confidentiality*

All information gained through student interviews and all work produced in class in confidential unless otherwise arranged with students. Full information on aims, curriculum issues and general progress of a class is available through the Planning Group, but individual privacy of participants is protected.

3.5 *Evaluation*

Evaluation is an ongoing process which focuses on the stated aims and objectives of the class; those aims and objectives are agreed to in general terms by the Planning Group and then negotiated between

tutors and students.

Students and tutors evaluate not only their own progress, but also the curriculum content and teaching methodologies; in this context formal testing is inappropriate.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jude Newcombe began working in adult basic education in 1982, on returning to the paid workforce when her two sons were of preschool age. Prior to that, she had worked as a high school teacher in Queensland for about seven years, completing a Bachelor of Arts degree from Queensland University as an external and part-time student. From 1975 to 1980, she worked as an employment and training adviser in employment offices in London'sEast End. During this time she gained experience as a trade union representative and was active in women's campaigns.

From 1982 to 1984, she worked as a tutor and assistant coordinator in the Access Department at the Council of Adult Education. In 1984, when the Workplace Basic Education Project was established at CAE, she became one of three founding coordinators who worked collaboratively to clarify and implement the processes and principles of the Project, and to establish a viable education program.

After five years as WBEP coordinator, she spent two years working with the Australian Colleges and Universities Staff Association as an industrial officer responsible for the union's journal, recruitment, and redrafting and restructuring a new award for education workers in the adult and community education sector.

She is currently working as the Executive Officer of the Network of Women in Further Education, a national organisation of women concerned with women's learning and women's access to training and further education, and is editor of the *Now in FE Newsletter*. She also teaches in Labour Market Programs with Carlton Reading and Writing, a community-based literacy program. This is her first published work.

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